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HERE WE ARE . . .

WHERE DO WE GO?

THE INDIAN CHILD AND EDUCATION

Thecla Bradshaw

André Renaud

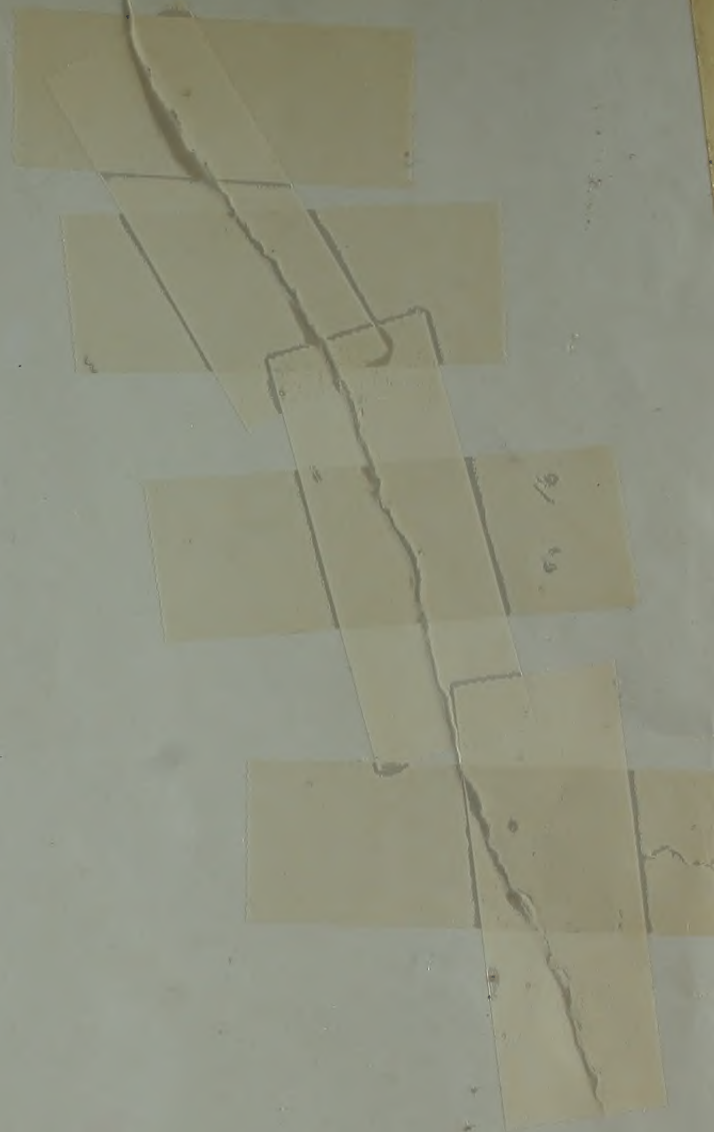
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We are delighted to make arrangements with Father Andre Renaud, O.M.I., and Thecla Bradshaw, well known Canadian journalist, for the use of this excellent booklet in the furtherance of our Centennial Tillicum Project.

The Tillicum Project reflects the nationwide concern of Canadian parents as to the welfare and education of Indian children and youth. It is a study-action program for local Home and School and Parent-Teacher associations. It is an act of friendship and neighbourly help which we hope will be useful to the Indian people in their struggle today for equal rights.

Fr. Renaud is Associate Professor, Department Special Education, University of Saskatchewan, in charge of Indian and Northern Education. He is Canada's outstanding authority in this field. Thecla Bradshaw, whose long standing interest in Indian people has taken her over many reserves in the north and on the prairies, is currently editor of the NORTHIAN, published by the Society for Indian and Northern Education.

This penetrating, authoritative booklet is a most helpful supplement to the Tillicum Kit which has already been distributed to every Home and School and Parent-Teacher association in Canada. We are privileged to be associated in its production and take pride in commending it to you.

C. M. BEDFORD,
Chairman, Indian Committee,
The Canadian Home and School
and Parent-Teacher Federation.

Here We Are Where Do We Go?

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES, CANADA

INTEGRATION

TALKING SOCIETY

LITERACY

SCIENCE

URBANIZATION

INDUSTRIALIZATION

COMMERCIALIZATION

INTER-DEPENDENCE

INDIAN BACKGROUND

ISOLATION

SILENT SOCIETY

OBSERVATION

EXPERIENCE

RESPECT FOR TRADITION

FOOD GATHERING

SHARING

SEPARATION

"We come from reserves in the forest and from fringes of towns.

Our ideas are new to you. One of our ideas is that school is a place to visit sometimes for half a day, or a whole day, or four or five days in a row when we are not away with our fathers and mothers on the traplines or when the sun is not shining.

Our beliefs are new to you. We believe that we learn most from our fathers and mothers, and from the fathers and mothers of our friends whom we visit every day and sometimes for several days at a time.

Our memories are not your memories at all. We remember last Treaty Day when we had a picnic near the schoolhouse where each of our brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers were given five dollars from the Queen for being Indian.

We know what images are but they are different from yours. Our images are of good fishermen, and men who can guide a skiff with outboard safely upstream along a river and past waterfalls, and women who work cleverly and patiently with their hands, and a God who likes to live in the forest.

Are our feelings different from yours? We feel love and fear, some times both together, especially when some of us must leave our homes and go away for the winter to a new school.

What is the meaning of attitude? Is it what we take inside us when we sit before the teacher at the schoolhouse and listen to stories of your cities and farms, your industries and machines and space voyages?

Perhaps you know that we have certain skills. Most of us can snare rabbits and small animals, help our fathers skin a moose or caribou, help our mothers bake bannock and smoke fresh meat, and pitch a tent quickly before sundown—pitch it facing the water where we get a good stiff breeze to keep the mosquitoes and black flies away . . ."

This is the Indian child we seek to educate. And where do we go from here?

What objectives does our educational system provide? Are these in line with what he knows and has experienced? Can he, the Indian child, advance from A to B, from known to unknown, by means of our present system?

If not, are there any tools in our educational kitbag that can be adapted to his needs, adapted quickly enough to provide him with firm footing whenever he does (as he must) face contemporary society as it invades the reserve, or as he leaves it to enter our cities?

INTEGRATION . . . ISOLATION

Objective one in our educational system: integration. Why not, instead, exchange and interchange? Today, Indian children are schooled for potential competence in our society, not for the up-dating and modernization of his own, nor for a blending of our two cultures.

Where and when they could be reached, Indian children for 25 years were offered a curriculum identical to our own. Statistics on school promotion and human experience tab up the catastrophic results.

The Indian has been Canadian for at least 4,000 years, our ancestors arriving some 3,600 years later. In attempting to foist our massive and complex concepts of the present and future upon the Indian it is conceivable that, as potential educators, we should delve more deeply into the original Canadians' history, presenting it clearly and fairly to him.

What better place to begin than in the school curriculum for both White and Indian children? Where **else** to start? How long can we pretend that current text books for all age groups deal adequately with Indian culture and history, especially in relation to those events connected with treaties and their subsequent administration of the past 100 years, events which excluded the Indian people from contact with our own and other societies of the world trying to catch up with 20th century trends of civilization?

There is abundant proof the world over that inertia is the affliction of societies cut off from normal contemporary trends of development. Fatalism, poverty—and the 'integration' of the welfare system soon follow.

Either we continue our attempts to integrate the Indians into our society by negating his own, or we integrate by cooperation, by recognition and a purposeful acceptance of where the Indian came from, his present state, and where he wants to go.

Thousands of years ago in Canada coming in from the west—the Canadian Indians, by whatever name. They came and stayed and did not die out as non-Indians expected. A few hundred years ago—our European invasion, and our anything but innocent assumption ever since that legal treaties sign away rights to moral and spiritual growth and the kind of daily existence the Indians happen to like, a kind closer to nature than we design.

But the "get back to nature" inclination is not always stronger than the Indian's aspiration to "get on with nature", i.e. his wish to acquire the mechanical know-how of the 20th century.

Integration, then, of a new kind should become a primary objective of education, of a kind that can first be reflected in curriculum adaptations proceeding from what the Indian knows and likes to what he likes and wishes to know: that is to say, in a curriculum patterned first on his environment, then leading to his knowledge of our own. Whether he accepts all or only part of what we teach will affect both cultures as they gradually merge. Foreseeably we too may substantially benefit.

TALKING SOCIETY... SILENT SOCIETY

Educational influences today tend to create talking societies. We extend and expand our talking via time and space through radios and television, loudspeakers, microphones, amplifiers and stereo, typewriters, record players, tape recorder and telephones, data processing equipment, programmed learning devices and school sound systems .

Here, indeed, is plenty of wire and gadgetry to pick up and broadcast to little Indians at school and to their elders, to little Whites and their parents — and to the world at large the rich drama of the Canadian Indian story, past, present and potential future.

In Indian communities silence is golden when success in the hunt can be destroyed by a word or a twig cracking. Silence was a virtue when food, clothing and even shelter depended upon maintaining it.

Talk was for speech making and story telling on prescribed occasions, and for the transmission of vital knowledge. It is fairly certain that Iago, the great boaster, was unpopular except in fire-lit circles.



In a hunting society silence nurtures a certain intuitive awareness which talking can destroy, an awareness of the character of individuals and of the needs and state of one's own society. Danger is sensed. It is there. The Indian did not need the scientist to tell him recently that ESP is valid, real and provable. His perceptive faculties are not blunted as ours by excessive physical security and comfort.

Today's school teachers soon become aware that Indians are a silent society, that illustration is their teacher of the past, their example and lesson. Films and filmstrips, some of them silent or with music especially for use in the early grades, would seem to meet an educational need to the partial exclusion at least of our talk-talk-talking method.

Even more urgent than the necessity to present full coverage of Indian history is the need to use some of the mechanical wonders outlined above in a full-scale program

- for Indian adult literacy and education
- as a means of presenting to Eurocanadians the history and present predicament of Indians
- to teach children in all Canadian schools the nature of Indian culture and perspective
- to provide teaching and learning resources for use in schools for children of Indian origin.

Silence is golden. But so is education. We are yet too timid in using the mechanical media for presenting and promoting it.

LITERACY...OBSERVATION

Almost without exception today the Indian people wish to read and write, to become part of our literate society.

As a literate society we read, write and transfer our talking and writing to relative permanency. This literacy tradition goes back some five thousand years though many forefathers came personally into it only a few generations ago.

Today we are exposed to duplicators, blueprints and carbons, newspapers, magazines, books, libraries, notebooks, brochures, pamphlets and filing systems, films and filmstrips.

Literacy is so much a part of our living experience that we are usually unaware to what extent this single factor has been the key to the scientific and technological findings which we indiscriminately label progress.

In Indian society, where literacy exists, it is not as broadly operative as in our own. The presence of literacy as a skill is not enough to make an Indian community literate in the full sense of the word. It must be applied to the various aspects of living over long periods of time to become as functional as oral language.

Communication between bands is still slight and newsletters to transmit diversified experiences amongst Indians across Canada is just beginning with the emergence of Friendship Centres.



There is a dearth of books and newspapers in homes on a reserve. Few Indians attend public libraries.

If, however, printed material is of direct interest to them, most Indians are potentially avid readers. Certain Indian adults without schooling of any kind have taught themselves to read. The desire is there and the subsequent need for us to provide more publications about and for the Indian people.

It is many years since parents and educators sensed a significant lack of childish devotion for Dick and Jane. Their "looking and seeing" still inspires less than enthusiasm. Such publications are not more likely to fire the Indian children with zest and zeal for learning.

It was this very lack of adequate teaching materials, texts and curriculum guides that prompted the Department of Education in Saskatchewan to ask the university to study the situation, launch improvements and, in general, assist teachers to do a better job.

In developing a curriculum with these teachers, the understandings contained in this article have been achieved and the objectives of Indian education redefined. It is now certain that the curriculum to be developed for children of Indian communities cannot be identical to one designed for children from urban centres.

Teachers training at the Saskatchewan university for work in Indian and northern areas have developed a curriculum guide for the first six years of elementary school. This is now an official appendix in the revised edition—Curriculum Guide of the Saskatchewan Department of Education. The Indian community is used as focal and starting point each year.

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A further sequence of units is being prepared to extend the experience of the child from his milieu to ours—with a less painful merging.

ONE HUNDRED BOOKS FOR INDIAN SCHOOL TEACHERS: this review of books with Indian content was also compiled by the teacher students at the University of Saskatchewan, by teachers seeking for ways and means to begin to fill the vacuum. It was compiled with the hope that the gap will soon be replenished by new texts with Indian content, texts originally designed for use in Indian and urban classrooms.

It is certain that when such books are commissioned, assigned and written, they can immediately be put to use in classrooms and by interested organizations across the country with minimum effort on the part of teachers and group leaders.

SCIENCE ... EXPERIENCE

Still another objective inherent in our educational system is the fostering of the scientific approach to learning and acquisition of skills. We compare, analyze, deduct and record. We tend to want even assumptions, religions, concepts and faiths to be measurable. Our science which produces automation which produces science is a strangely hermetic circle which sends us to outer space or constricts us to the office desk in our avid search for factual, provable data.



Right or wrong, this is not the Indian way today or in history. His ways, sensory and perceptive, are empirical. They are based on experiment, observation and an assumption that the repetition of nature's cycles gives proof enough that God's in His heaven, all's right with the world.

A Chippewayan mother of seven at Wollaston Lake, Saskatchewan, who is told one day by her spouse, "We leave tomorrow for the hunt!" does not question the science of reasoning behind the abrupt announcement. It means nothing less than his assumption that she and her family will be ready to leave with dog-team and sleigh for a journey of some several months in sub-zero weather to follow the caribou, tenting in the open at night and padding along with the dogs by day.

She simply packs up and goes. Though her Chipp hunter has based his decision on a wealth of observations, comparisons, analyses and deductions, his final conclusion, "We leave!" is ultimately more a product of instinct than of scientific reasoning.

It is a thin fine line that exists between science as we know it, and the proof-by-experiment as the Indian understands it. In channeling the particular talents the Indians have acquired, educators will note their keen powers of observation especially with regard to detail, their ability to select essentials from non-essentials and, more important, their highly developed instinct for fathoming the inherent qualities of nature. Surely these are the attributes of the true scientist whatever his field of specialization.

URBANIZATION... RESPECT FOR TRADITION

Education today equips us to tolerate, battle for and against, and to contemplate sometimes with painfully deliberate rationalization the world of cities, high-rise apartment living, split-level homes and families — in short, the urban world without yesterdays, but with a big, promising and thoroughly mechanized tomorrow.

Our family unit is made up almost exclusively of husband, wife and two children, members of the preceding generation gone but not forgotten as Senior Citizens residing on other premises. Institutions and recognized leaders take the latter's place in the lives of the young — scientific institutions and scientific people — libraries and Dr. Kinsey and Dr. Spock.

But the Indian people are still inclined to regard tradition as teacher and educator. And only their newly educated in our schools are losing their once profound esteem for the elders and the knowledge they imparted by word of mouth and by example.

It is traditional for the Indian to love nature and resent even the new houses too often set out by the government on a flat stretch of land conveniently bulldozed of all greenery.

They pack up and leave their new environment. They go back to the wretched shacks of tar paper, or rusted metal, or flattened cartons set in the forest. They go back repeatedly until, in numerous instances in Canada, the government in desperation burns down the forest huts and a bitter, resentful people have no choice but to be "integrated".

It is traditional to blame the White man for all the suffering and poverty in Indian communities. Our urban wealth, often hard come-by, is to the Indian an ugly symbol of injustice, our cities monstrous monuments to mark the places once their hunting grounds.

It is traditional for the Indian to look to the past and the present, to disregard the future as though tomorrow were a dream.

These are facts of our urbanity and a few traditions conspicuous today in Indian communities. Educators, it would seem, must find some subtle means of persuading the Indian people to look a little toward tomorrow, toward Canada as a whole and toward other countries as the various societies strive to attune their cultures to an ever-changing contemporaneity.

INDUSTRIALIZATION...FOOD GATHERING

Ambition or fear: which emotion wins when the young Indian hears or senses the big boom of industrialization? Both feelings are mixed and unusual courage is required when a boy or a man decides to leave a forest reserve to explore our commercialized world of industry.

Before any attempt can be made either to understand the conflict in the hearts of Indians as they pull up their roots and seek a place in our society, or to assist him in finding that place, the dazzling but appalling contrast between the Indian's small world of the reserve in nature's setting, and our commercialized centres of industry must be considered.

Have you ever watched an Indian child of ten as he sees, for the first time, a motor car? It jogs along over a field where it was hauled by a tractor to an area without roads or railways. The field is on a reservation.

In Manitoba over one-third of the Indian reserves cannot be reached by railway or road and it is in similar areas across Canada that the Indians, contrary to general knowledge, suffer most from poverty, hunger and very real malnutrition.

It is commonly believed that Indians entirely cut off from civilization by the forest are able to subsist on the land, to hunt sufficient game for their needs. Stunning disillusionment waits for any non-Indian who has lived on such a reservation. Poverty here is unmatched anywhere in the world.

Game is so sparse in many areas that weeks go by when an Indian family is without meat and subsists on either bannock and a little fish — or entirely on bannock, a bread made from flour, water, baking powder and a bit of grease. When administration moves in, welfare rations keep body together and soul downcast.

It is not the purpose of this article to outline the gory dimensions of poverty on woodland reserves or to detail the reasons behind the picture of physical destitution and moral degeneration. But it is suggested that the educator should first acknowledge that these things **may** be so and then proceed to conduct to his own satisfaction the most thorough investigation possible. If he is a teacher, it is feasible that this can be done within the Indian settlement closest to his centre of activity. The Indian people usually respond with good will to tact and discretion.

Only when sufficient numbers of authorities look for themselves and see beyond what they wish to see — to what is there — can the average Canadian be made aware that Canada's bushland has ugly secrets, proof of which have already created more shock and astonishment in foreign countries than in our own.

Frequently the stunning impact our cities make upon the Indian drives him directly to the slums and beer parlour.

The Indian arrives in a city. Perhaps this is his first journey away from a reserve, his first glimpse of "our world."

It is possible that he understands and speaks some English. But much of what we say will escape him while he, less talkative, will be literally tongue-tied.

- When can I cross the street where so many cars are dashing by?
- How do I use a telephone to tell my friends I am here? Where are they? Where shall I sleep tonight?
- Which of these factories might give me work to do? How do I get in? What is made there?
- Which bus goes to the Indian Agency? Where is the agency from here?
- Should I take a taxi? Have I got enough money?
- In short — where do I go from here?

Perhaps two Indians have come together but the situation is no different. One does not ask a White man on the streets for help — if one is Indian.

Our world of clattering machinery, dizzy overpasses, zooming trucks and buses and cars — the things we produce proudly in the name of commerce and industry strike against the eyes and ears and sensibilities of the Indian and seem to him a thundering repetition of the words, "Go home where you belong!"

Friendship centres and up-grading schools slowly but surely change this lurid picture. But not as yet do they reach the majority of incoming Indians to our cities. Here is a field for research, planning, and dynamic action for many educators, from teenagers in our society to those in positions of authority.

Co-operation in this field may be expected from Indian persons since many of the boys and men excel in acquiring mechanical and technical skills, some without any formal training. Certainly the majority of Indians are already aware that our educational system stresses the need for man's increasing adaptation to industrialization. Some of them even like it.

COMMERCIALIZATION ... SHARING

Twentieth-century man in Canada, non-Indian, manipulates, destroys, and reconstructs his environment constantly, increasing his separation from nature and minimizing its normal demands, restrictions and privileges.

Education instils the desire to gain a marketable skill, to acquire private property and to accumulate capital. These three have almost sanctified connotations in our minds and consciences.

The bulk of our civil laws originate from these acquired preferences drilled into us from infancy.

With equal intensity the exact opposite has been instilled in the mind and morality of Indian society — the sharing concept. It is a die-hard principle still remarkably evident among Indians on the fringes-of-town and to a greater extent on reservations.

How does it operate? How does one give one's personal possessions to another? Why does an Indian hunter with large family share his kill of the day, week or month with all those Indian families about him?

It is the custom of centuries. It is the Indian custom today. It is also the reason why Indians educated in our society sometimes feel required to cut all ties with their relatives and friends of the reserve to live in the city, and one of the reasons the reservations are short of educated leaders.

It is the reason some of the educated Indians go back to the reserve, never to return to our society.

If it were simply a case of preference, the choice facing Indians would be simpler. Which do I wish — the commercialized life of urban towns and cities or the life-on-relief of the reserve?

He does not want to rely on relief but he has failed in the city. He now accepts relief because game is inadequate and the money economy of the reserve consists mainly of charge-it at the local trading post — and pay with furs.

Programs of relief are costly and incomprehensive. This is due to the extreme difficulty of administrators and others to grasp the total socio-economic picture of the reserve. No amount of relief can mitigate our failure to protect an Indian community where employment exists for them, a community threatened by a host of incoming commercial fishermen with vastly superior equipment.

Relief benefits are negated by the devastation the industrial revolution creates when entire communities of Indian fishermen are informed by mail that fishing from skiffs with gillnets is outlawed and that only trapnets from steel boats (at a cost of some several thousand dollars for a single "outfit") are now permitted in what were previously and exclusively Indian fishing waters, the revenue from which provided the entire source of the Indians' annual cash income. No provision was made for alternative employment. This is a specific case in Canada and there are others like it.

It happens today. History is not to blame. Parents and teachers, White citizens and Indian must be vigilant.

It seems evident that educators must join the sparse ranks of those who seek to ensure that the natural resources remaining on or about Indian communities are developed to afford maximum employment of and for Indians.

Commercialization and sharing: the two are in conflict. The Indians have no bridge between the two. Nor has the larger Canadian society. Educators may yet devise the tools to build it.

INTER-DEPENDENCE . . . SEPARATION

What is a White Canadian? What is an Indian Canadian?

The first image is a man without a face, a woman with a fluctuating personality, a child with strained, sophisticated eyes.

The second image is a man on Main Street, in the forest, at the Welfare agency, sighting a moose, sizing up the White man silently. It is a woman of many ages, sometimes old while young in years, or young in actions when old in years, a woman with a look of patience. It is a child with wide and questioning eyes.

The first image is hazy, the second clear.

In Canada where cultures are mixed and inter-dependence increasing, education takes little note of ethnic customs except to permit absence from school for observance of holidays.

This has decreased the tendency for personal identification with any particular ancestral group and has alienated the individual even from himself. Civilized man is often accused of being part-man, part-woman, our wise ones and leaders and executives often ailing in body, football heroes and athletes without the necessity of assuming an intellectual role.

What is our composite identity? Do we have one? Or are we bits and pieces not quite melted in the melting pot?

Most Canadians who have travelled extensively in other countries of the world are inclined to the opinion that the Canadian character, per se, is highly distinctive and recognizable. Nevertheless, Canadians are still in the throes of adjusting and adapting to fellow members born of quite different cultures and environments than the one we are attempting to create together.

Not that we yet know the nature of this society we are building at break-neck speed, except that we aspire to democracy and, notably in the case of the Indian, fail to achieve it.

Otherwise, nationality seems to bear little relationship to our Canadian pattern of life. We are accustomed to our multi-cultured society if only because we cannot otherwise gain influence and strength as a country.

A society of mixed cultures is complex. We find oil for the ego and food for prestige in organizations where verbal leadership, not necessarily example, is often the primary requisite for election.

While many Indian leaders of history were wise councillors and orators each was equally famed for some great physical feat of endurance or bravery.

A simple framework existed in Indian societies for assessing attributes of leadership: example by deed, wisdom in judgment.

Who knows what subtle factors or tough tactics foist our leaders to their positions of power. We only know that these factors are complex. Education trains us for and by complexity.

Our whole society is built on an impersonal, complex and ever expanding inter-dependence between its members and their innumerable organizations, as well as with other societies round the world.

Indian people are homogeneous, they form a culture apart, one strikingly identifiable. This is partly due to the geographic isolation of their socially reinforced reserve system. In-breeding is constant and cross fertilization of ideas, skills and attitudes is minimal.

Each Indian community has a definite identity well known to its members. This is a disturbing factor to those of us who inhabit the large, complex, alienating society. How does it feel to have a strong group identity? How does this identity operate within the mind and heart of an individual?

A person in an Indian community is aware of inter-dependence only within his particular group. Each Indian settlement regards itself as "WE" and the nebulous outside world, the fragmented segments on the reserve of government, church, welfare, trading establishment and even school as "THEY".

One remarkable feature in Canadian Indian society is the separate identity of one tribe to that of another. Yet we are aware of a composite picture of the Indian wherever in Canada he may be.

Crees do not wish to be identified as Saulteaux, nor the Saulteaux as Chippewayan.

Foreseeably this will rapidly undergo change as communication is facilitated. The National Indian Council is already evidence of the desire to unite, in spite of much publicized division of opinion and friction within the ranks.

A remarkable paradox in Canadian history is reflected in the fact that Indian affairs were, until recently, supervised by the department responsible for immigrants. And education as we know it today conveys the distinct impression that Indians must be integrated as Canadians!

What better illustrations have we of the Indians' cultural separation from Canadian society as a whole?

Yet, in the collective memory and consciousness of the Indian he has no ancestral tie with any country but Canada.

HERE WE ARE . . . WHERE DO WE GO? Who is to teach and who is to learn? Will the process always be lopsided in Canada?





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